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SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 6th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 23 April 1991, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Ms. PALME (Sweden)

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General debate (continued)

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Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

GENERAL DEBATE (continued)

1. Mr. LUNA (Peru) underscored the gravity of the cholera epidemic in his country: currently 150,000 had succumbed and over a thousand had died, and the epidemic was now spreading to neighbouring countries in the region.

2. He expressed appreciation for the promptness and effectiveness with which UNICEF had mobilized its human and logistic resources to help the Peruvian population during the crisis in the country.

3. However, in view of the dimensions the epidemic had taken on, it was important to take urgent new steps, to find supplementary funding and to design a special medium- and long-term programme that would fight all the causes of the disease. Cholera could not be seen as a simple health crisis. It threatened to become a permanent phenomenon when it struck populations living in conditions of extreme poverty, in countries whose economic situation did not allow them to combat it effectively.

4. The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children stipulated that "through international cooperation and solidarity it should now be possible to achieve concrete results in many fields - to revitalize economic growth and development, to protect the environment, to prevent the spread of fatal and crippling diseases and to achieve greater social and economic justice".

5. Yet the countries of the third world continued to face a cruel and inescapable reality: child mortality, endemic diseases, malnutrition and illiteracy were omnipresent. On the threshold of the twenty-first century, the basic needs of two thirds of the world's population still had not been met, and enormous sectors of Latin America, for instance, were stagnating and even regressing.

6. Despite the efforts of the international community, the realities of 1990 were the following: 14 million children had died, 100 million were malnourished, a third of the population of the developing countries did not have safe drinking water and 80 million children were being subjected to unacceptable exploitation. The situation would have been much more serious if UNICEF had not done remarkable work that deserved the highest recognition. It must continue its work and design mechanisms for improving the conditions of a large part of the population of the third world.

7. His delegation noted with satisfaction that in recent years UNICEF had sought to achieve an appropriate balance in the country programmes for the three regions of the third world. It was important, however, to strive for a better allocation of assistance, and especially to increase the proportion devoted to sanitation and the supply of drinking water.

(Mr. Luna, Peru)

8. UNICEF was still trying to mobilize and raise the consciousness of the most needy segments of the population in order to facilitate their participation in specific programmes. In Peru, certain recently established programmes aimed to mobilize women so that the acquisition of simple techniques, individual as well as collective, could become a factor for change in the living conditions of women and children.

9. It was understandable that UNICEF, owing to its success, should seek to improve its infrastructure. However, it was important to improve the operational capacity not only on the basis of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s, but also by taking account of the views of governments on what had been accomplished and what remained to be done. It would thus be possible to define with greater precision the needs of each region of the third world. In addition, the temptation should be avoided of undertaking too many activities, the only result of which would be a dispersal of effort and reduced effectiveness. His delegation supported the criterion that assistance must be directed to where it was most needed. While the commitment by UNICEF to Africa was fully justified, it must also take into consideration the deteriorating situation of millions in the other regions of the third world, especially Latin America.

10. Mr. SCHILLING (Germany) said that UNICEF could point to remarkable successes, such as the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the convening of the World Summit for Children and especially the achievement of the goal of the universal child immunization (UCI) campaign. His Government was continuing to support UNICEF activities, as could be seen in its increased contributions in 1990 and 1991 despite severe budgetary constraints.

11. In 1990, UNICEF had constantly tried to bring help quickly and effectively wherever children were the victims of natural and man-made disasters. Germany applauded its activities and saw its humanitarian mandate as a global one, but was convinced that UNICEF should not try to become a universal development agency intervening in areas that were the province of other United Nations agencies. The Executive Director was therefore to be congratulated for his efforts to strengthen inter-agency cooperation, an area where much had been achieved at the headquarters level. More could be done, however, at the field level, through cooperation between multilateral and bilateral donors and interaction between headquarters and field offices. Joint use of a field office by different United Nations organizations could help significantly to improve coordination of their respective activities and reduce administrative costs.

12. In their response to emergency situations, the agencies involved should not engage in a competitive race for donors' funds but should compete to find the best solution and coordinate their activities. The recent Gulf crisis had shown that hasty, parallel and even rival efforts served no one. The way in

(Mr. Schilling, Germany)

which the United Nations system had reacted to the alarming situation of the Kurdish refugees left much to be desired. In emergency situations, donors could respond more effectively when dealing with a single focal agency.

13. Collaboration and coordination were also needed to implement the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action. However, in the concerted efforts that would be required, UNICEF should continue to be guided by the decisions of the Executive Board.

14. In the final analysis, UNICEF success was determined by its projects in the field. However, that success should not distract attention from its main area of activity. The Fund should follow up on programmes by making them sustainable and extending them to hitherto unreached groups before launching new initiatives. Its rich experience in immunization and other basic areas (such as oral rehydration therapy (ORT) or access to drinking water) should be used to develop sustainable primary-health-care systems, particularly in Africa. UNICEF should continue to work with the World Health Organization (WHO) in the fight against the spread of AIDS, and coordinate closely with WHO and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in the fields of family planning and birth control.

15. With regard to administration and finance, his delegation would find it helpful to receive the budget documents and the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) well in advance in order to be able to study them properly.

16. The draft report of ACABQ raised a number of questions. It was indeed to be feared that the massive increase in the number of posts and in upgrading would be ill-advised. His Government was concerned about the trend towards ever-increasing administrative costs and the growing weight of headquarters services. It should be remembered that UNICEF was a field-oriented organization. Moreover, it seemed that in 1990-1991 the budget reserve had been used in part to finance commitments concerning office space without the prior approval of the Board. His delegation would appreciate receiving further clarification on the matter in the Administration and Finance Committee.

17. Sir David HANNAY (United Kingdom) said that the promises made at the World Summit for Children must be kept, and that the United Kingdom would soon ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

18. A non-governmental Children's Rights Development Unit was to be set up in the United Kingdom to monitor the implementation of the Convention; the Unit had already established links with the UNICEF National Committee. In general, national committees could act as catalysts in setting up monitoring bodies.

19. The United Kingdom, which had taken part in the preparation of the World Declaration and Plan of Action, would be reporting to UNICEF on its own national plan of action during the course of the year. A National Summit had

(Sir David Hannay, United Kingdom)

been organized by the UNICEF Office in the United Kingdom and the British National Children's Bureau in order to raise public awareness about the Declaration. Moreover, the British Minister of Health had requested that measures should be taken to ensure that the United Kingdom's programme was managed in keeping with the fundamental message of the Summit that "children should be first".

20. The programme would be re-examined in the context of the reduction of poverty, the first victims of which were most often women and children. In that regard, all donors should have a better understanding of the poor, as well as better data about them. Donors should take into account local knowledge of poverty and seek the views of poor people. The United Kingdom, which had been working on poverty assessments in Kenya and Bangladesh, hoped to contribute to the World Bank's country poverty assessments.

21. Work in that area had led to the conclusion that direct action must be carried out through the Aid Programme. In order to have a more direct effect on poverty, each major aid programme of the Overseas Development Agency would have a significant poverty component, and funds would be earmarked to alleviate poverty (for example, specific social sector grants).

22. UNICEF was to be congratulated on its achievements in improving women's and children's health in developing countries and, in particular, on its universal child immunization programme. However, the Fund should continue its efforts to find the most effective means of achieving its objectives.

23. Like many other donor countries, the United Kingdom based its strategies for health sector assistance on the needs and interests of recipient countries. That entailed, first, accepting the fact that available resources were never sufficient; secondly, encouraging countries to set priorities which reflected their people's needs; thirdly helping them select cost-effective technologies to tackle priority problems; and fourthly, supporting the establishment of sustainable, well-managed and adequately financed health care systems.

24. All those critical aspects should be taken into account in all measures undertaken to implement the goals of the Summit. He welcomed the reference in the Plan of Action that the child-specific actions proposed must be pursued as part of the strengthening of broader national development programmes. Greater efforts should be made to bring donors and national Governments together to consider the policy and management implications for health goals adopted in each country. Consequently UNICEF should play an additional coordinating role in that area. Some country representatives had already assumed that role. The United Kingdom would be ready to submit to the Executive Board a draft decision encouraging UNICEF to strengthen its health sector coordination activities with national Governments and other donors at the country level.

25. In conclusion, he wished to make a number of suggestions. First UNICEF should be given guidance on ways to achieve the goals of the World Summit; his

(Sir David Hannay, United Kingdom)

delegation would submit a draft decision on the health aspects. Second, the ways in which countries and international organizations reported to UNICEF on measures to follow up the Plan of Action should be clarified. Third, the Ex utive Board should endorse the Executive Director's proposals to place greater emphasis on Africa and to support measures to combat AIDS. Fourth, the Board should indicate to UNICEF where it had comparative advantage in the handling of emergencies. Fifth, cooperation with other United Nations organizations in the area of field work and programming should be encouraged. Sixth, the proposals on the organization of the Board should be adopted in order to ensure more effective management of the Fund's growing resources. Seventh, after devoting adequate time to their study, the Board should adopt the programmes under consideration, as well as a budget. Finally, the Board must ensure that its decisions helped speed up the process of giving priority to children in international thinking and in action.

26. Ms. SETH (India) said that, in the last decade of the millennium, the world had tremendous hope for children and women, in particular the most destitute. Never before had there been such commitment to the cause of children. She drew particular attention to the World Summit for Children, the World Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the Summit, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Those commitments should be pursued with optimism and a greater sense of responsibility. That was precisely India's approach to issues concerning women and children, the eradication of poverty, water supply, environment, education and health. India was currently involved in a regional effort to develop a detailed plan of action for the countries members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

27. In order to reduce infant and child mortality and morbidity, India was continuing to expand its Integrated Child Development Services and endeavouring to improve the quality of services and identify groups in greatest need of special assistance. It had been necessary to ensure intersectoral coordination and to relate the entire gamut of social services to a wider process of demographic, social and economic transformation. In that connection India had developed a uniform media policy.

28. On the occasion of the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child, India had adopted new strategies for protecting adolescent girls, which provided for assistance in the areas of health, nutrition and non-formal education with a view to developing their potential as powerful communicators and social animators in the village.

29. Maternal and child health programmes were the cornerstone of India's social sector planning and human resource development effort. In that respect, her delegation welcomed the increase in the Fund's expenditure on the child, from 40 per cent in 1989 to 45 per cent in 1990.

30. After more than 15 years of its multisectoral child survival and development programme, UNICEF should begin to focus on such new areas as

(Ms. Seth, India)

adolescence, handicapped children, children of working mothers, child labour and, lastly, morally endangered children, such as child prostitutes and street children, to whose plight Sweden and Mexico had already drawn attention.

31. However, the situation of children could not be improved without taking account of the situation of women. The discrimination which women faced in society and in the home struck at the root of development efforts. Her delegation therefore welcomed the increase in UNICEF expenditure on women-related programmes, from 29 per cent in 1990 to 31 per cent in 1991. The safe motherhood campaign, already launched by UNICEF in collaboration with other organizations which were not part of the United Nations system, must be converted into a decade-long programme.

32. As part of India's efforts to enable people to take care of their basic needs themselves, it had emphasized the employment of women. The strategy was to make women aware of their rights and develop their skills, thus creating the conditions for self-employment and income-generation. A major programme for improving the employment situation of rural women was in operation nation wide. There were also plans to facilitate the access of women to credit institutions, particularly in rural areas.

33. In the various development programmes, India's approach had moved from infrastructure creation to community mobilization as a step towards better management of the infrastructure creation. For instance, since women were the main users of water, community mobilization and consciousness-raising focused mainly on poor village women. Currently, efforts were being made to create a mechanism for sustaining the existing services.

34. Knowing from experience that health and immunization intervention must be backed by nutritional measures, India was, through integrated child development services, distributing supplementary nutrition for children and pregnant and lactating mothers to combat anaemia and iodine or other deficiencies. However, such measures required a multidimensional approach and an increase in people's purchasing power to make more food available to them. Her delegation suggested that UNICEF should make the issue of nutrition at the household level one of its major concerns during the nineties, and should aim to develop a credible, integrated nutrition policy for the entire developing world. Unfortunately, UNICEF expenditure on nutrition continued to be insufficient (5 per cent in 1990, according to the Executive Director's report). Her delegation noted with satisfaction that India's suggestion to relate nutrition activities to primary health care had been included in the UNICEF statements on nutrition policy. It would also like to see some mention of its proposal for strengthening the public distribution system in order to improve household-level food availability. On the other hand, the meeting of high-level policy makers held in Florence on safe motherhood and breast-feeding in July-August 1990 at the International Child Development Centre had been a success, and other aspects of maternal and child welfare should be covered in more such meetings.

(Ms. Seth, India)

35. UNICEF should also focus attention in all parts of the world on the control of population growth. A direct propagation of various methods of family planning was an absolute imperative for the developing world.

36. The ravages of AIDS in large parts of Africa, Europe and the Americas demanded world-wide attention, and her delegation supported the efforts made by UNICEF to combat that scourge.

37. Education was at the moment a global priority. In India, the literacy rate had improved steadily from 36 per cent in 1981 to 53 per cent in 1991. Her Government had just launched an education project in the state of Bihar, one of the most backward in the country. The project rejected the traditional centralized bureaucratic mould in favour of a grass-roots approach that gave village women's groups the decision-making power and the catalytic role. UNICEF had already responded favourably to the project, which depended on assistance from UNICEF general and supplementary funds.

38. Her delegation emphasized the need in the coming years for inter-agency cooperation, which would add a new dimension to the work of UNICEF. Inter-agency cooperation should in its view be institutionalized and should include within its scope bilateral agencies such as the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) or the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA).

39. She concluded with two appeals: one for an increase in UNICEF funding, since its programme expenditure had risen by only 8 per cent betweeen 1989 and 1990, less than the inflation rate in many countries; and the other for increased funding for nutrition, the advancement of women and family planning.

40. The challenges were indeed daunting, but India was convinced that the international community was in a position to rise to them.

41. Mr. GARDEZI (Pakistan) recalled the major events involving international action focused on children: the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Conference on Education for All, the World Summit for Children, which had been convened at the initiative of six Governments, one of them Pakistan, and, lastly, the approval in 1990 by the Executive Board of the goals and strategies for children in the 1990s. There had been a tremendous advance in universal child immunization, with immunization coverage in developing countries increasing from less than 20 per cent in 1981 to over 80 per cent for tuberculosis, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus and poliomyelitis, and only measles vaccinations remaining below the 80-per-cent target.

42. The challenges presented by the 1990s were, however, enormous. The developing countries, where most of the world's children lived, were hampered in their efforts by indebtedness, adverse terms of trade and low commodity prices, all too frequently compounded by natural disasters, civil strife in many cases, and the growing threat of AIDS.

(Mr. Gardezi, Pakistan)

43. The World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children set ambitious but not impossible goals. UNICEF had estimated that it would cost $20 billion in the next decade to achieve them. Two thirds of that amount would have to be generated by the developing countries themselves. His Government was pursuing a policy of self-reliance in order to reduce Pakistan's dependence on foreign resources. However, with the developing countries' debt amounting to some $1,300 billion on which interest repayments alone came to $200 billion, and with commodity prices at their lowest level in 60 years, the realization of the Declaration's goals might have to remain just a commitment. The proposed debt-relief schemes for children could be welcome, especially in view of the Gulf war which in Pakistan's case had already cost $1 billion.

44. Despite its financial constraints, his Government was determined to implement the World Declaration and the Plan of Action to the best of its ability. Pakistan's priority remained the promotion of child survival and development, since it ranked thirty-second in 1989 for under-five mortality rates (owing to low birth rates, acute respiratory infections and malnutrition). The figures for other factors such as adult literacy rates, primary school enrolment, female literacy, maternal mortality or access to safe water, were discouraging. Thirty-two per cent of Pakistan's urban population and 29 per cent of the rural population lived below the poverty line. Yet 17 per cent of exports of goods and services were utilized for debt-servicing. None the less, his Government was resolved to confront the enormous task before it.

45. As a follow-up measure to the World Summit for Children, his Government had recommended, at the summit meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation held at Male in November 1990, the adoption of practical steps to improve conditions for children. The parliament of Pakistan was considering establishing a parliamentary committee on children. Pakistan had ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990. The Government was well placed to integrate the Declaration and Plan of Action into its national programmes, since it was currently in the process of preparing a new master plan of operations for 1992-1996 and its eighth five-year plan. The Government was working in close collaboration with the UNICEF office in Islamabad, with which it had discussed the formation of a task force to prepare its national programme of action pursuant to the Plan of Action.

46. The well-being of children was a priority concern in Pakistan, where there were some five and a half million births every year and 56.5 million children under the age of 16, of whom 22.5 per cent were under the age of five. In addition for the past decade Pakistan had provided shelter for some 3 million refugees from Afghanistan, a large number of whom were children. Today those children were living in refugee camps, often undernourished, in poor health and without access to education. With the reduction in international assistance for Afghan refugees, much of the burden had fallen on Pakistan alone.

(Mr. Gardezi, Pakistan)

47. A special concern of the Government of Pakistan was the condition of the girl child. The Government recognized the contribution of female literacy to the reduction in maternal mortality, better child care and the deceleration of population growth. As stated by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, the development of the country would remain an elusive goal as long as half of the population was denied adequate education and meaningful participation in the decision-making process.

48. Self-reliance being a fundamental objective of its policy, the Government had launched a programme of denationalization and encouragement of the private sector so as to accelerate development and energize the national economy. In the meantime, it was coping with the structural adjustments needed in an economy undergoing transition as well as with the economic impact of the war in the Gulf.

49. He congratulated the Executive Director on the quality, clarity and realism of his annual report. His delegation was pleased to note that child health continued to command the bulk of programme expenditure. In cooperation with UNICEF, Pakistan had made great strides in developing an immunization and oral rehydration therapy programme. The immunization programme had led to an average increase of 10 per cent in all antigens for children aged from 12 to 23 months, and a 30 per cent increase in those under 12 months. Remarkable progress had also been made in protecting against neonatal tetanus, and 80 per cent of mothers had been made aware of oral rehydration therapy. The control of acute respiratory infections was also progressing satisfactorily and efforts were being redoubled to expand immunization against measles. In order to maintain those successes, surveillance of vaccine preventable diseases must be strengthened and primary health care must be further expanded.

50. Less than one third of the population had access to an adequate water supply, and less than one fifth had any sanitation facilities. UNICEF was actively engaged in those fields in Pakistan, and he noted with satisfaction that UNICEF's expenditure in those areas had increased by $6 million in 1990; on the other hand, the percentage of supplementary funding in those two areas had declined since 1970-1979. At the end of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, in 1990, only 60 per cent of the population of the developing countries had had access to clean water and only 25 per cent to proper sanitation facilities.

51. His delegation had noted with interest the Executive Director's proposals on the restructuring of national budgets and of official development assistance as a means of generating the necessary resources for attaining the goals of the World Summit, and had further noted that the Executive Director had also drawn attention to the social costs of adjustment programmes, which tended to have the greatest impact on the most deprived groups in society.

52. In conclusion, he reaffirmed his Government's unshakeable commitment to the goals of the World Summit for Children. Pakistan would do its utmost to improve the health and quality of life of its children.

53. Mr. TREPCZYNSKI (Poland) said that never before had the international community so forcefully reasserted its responsibility for all the children of the world. The task was now to translate into reality the potential represented by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Declaration and Plan of Action adopted at the World Summit for Children. The undertaking required continued efforts on the part of governmental and non-governmental institutions and national and international organizations, as well as the mobilization of sizeable resources. It was encouraging to note that some countries had already begun to apply the provisions of the Convention and to adapt their domestic legislation as a result.

54. The Polish National Committee for UNICEF had recently organized, with the Institute of Law of the Polish Academy of Sciences, a conference on the legal and other consequences for Poland of its accession to the Convention. Steps had also been taken to familiarize schoolchildren with the text of the Convention.

55. His delegation commended UNICEF's External Relations Group for its activities in connection with the media and for its excellent publications on the Convention and the Summit. It would be desirable for an information bulletin on the implementation of the Convention in various countries to be published periodically in order to stimulate its promotion and facilitate the necessary exchange of experience. The item merited a special section in the next report on the state of the world's children.

56. His delegation was satisfied with the programme of action submitted in the documents for the session, notably the report of the Executive Director and the medium-term plan for the period 1991-1994. He noted with satisfaction the progress attained in universal child immunization and endorsed the conclusion that UNICEF action in Africa should be given priority. His delegation was greatly concerned at the tragic plight of children in the Persian Gulf region, and appreciated the action taken by UNICEF in that region, which merited additional aid. He was disturbed by the degradation of the environment in the Gulf and elsewhere, including Poland, where its adverse impact on children was becoming increasingly alarming.

57. He referred to the continued difficulties being experienced by many children in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in terms of nutrition, health care and quality of life, and especially in large families, hospitals and orphanages. An estimated 15 per cent of all children in Poland were handicapped in some way. In Poland, single mothers were responsible for meeting the needs of some 1.5 million children. Crèches, kindergartens and other establishments for children were being closed owing to a lack of resources. Accordingly, his delegation saw a need for UNICEF to take new initiatives, without prejudice to developing countries, based on the resolution on Central and Eastern Europe adopted in 1990 by the Executive Board.

58. While his delegation found satisfactory the steps so far taken, such as the round table on safety nets for children in Central and Eastern Europe,

(Mr. Trepczynski, Poland)

held at Warsaw in October 1990, UNICEF's involvement should not be limited to such forms of action. The agency should, as soon as possible, undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the situation of children in the region and establish a suitable programme of action. In that connection the UNICEF Geneva Office should play a more active role in Eastern Europe.

59. He congratulated the Greeting Card Operation, which had generated increased sales of UNICEF products in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, thus strengthening the financial independence of their National Committees. The Polish National Committee for UNICEF expected to double its sale of greeting cards by the end of the year and to treble it within two years.

60. He noted with satisfaction that UNICEF's budget continued to grow, both in terms of revenue and expenditure, and that a high percentage of UNICEF staff were working in the field. Given the constant expansion of its activities, a limited increase in its staff was justified.

61. Mr. TEELEY (United States of America) said that the events of the past two years could not fail to serve as a reminder of the circumstances in which UNICEF had been established in war-torn Europe over 40 years earlier. Instead of working only in the field of development, where its responsibilities lay, UNICEF was often called upon to relieve suffering in areas of conflict. Nevertheless, the Fund had continued to broaden the field of its activities, meeting new challenges, such as the AIDS epidemic at the current time, and thereby assuming growing responsibilities. Its resources were likely to increase only modestly over the next few years, while new demands for emergency or special assistance were being added to the already considerable requirements in the more traditional areas of education, health, agriculture and family planning. Although national Governments were grappling with the impact of economic recession and debt, they were nevertheless committed to pursuing the goals of the World Summit for Children.

62. In that climate, the Executive Board would review the Fund's budget for the next two years. His delegation, which intended to make sure that best use was made of available resources, believed that there were savings to be made and that there should be better cooperation between UNICEF and its partners in the United Nations system. The Board should improve its methods of work so that its members could fulfil their responsibilities for guiding UNICEF programmes.

63. Referring to the report of the Executive Director on the work carried out in 1990, he noted with satisfaction the success of the World Summit for Children and the universal child immunization programme. He welcomed the contribution by UNICEF in that field as well as the work done by the private sector, particularly through private voluntary activities and the national committees affiliated with the Fund, in preparing for and ensuring the success of the Summit as well as implementing the measures adopted on that occasion to

(Mr. Teeley, United States)

improve the health and welfare of children. Together with the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All, the Summit had clearly demonstrated that there was a world-wide consensus and collective will to address serious deficiencies in education, health and the development of children within the current decade. Nevertheless, the real measure of success was yet to be determined in the concrete actions to be taken as a follow-up to those meetings. The Executive Board would provide guidance to UNICEF in defining its role in implementing the Plan of Action and the appropriate focus for utilizing Summit goals to develop national programmes of action. That was an area where it would be important to ensure full cooperation with the other parts of the United Nations system so that resources remained focused on activities that benefited children directly.

64. The United States had already embarked on its own plan of action. A delegation had recently visited Africa in order to study in the field the situation of children of the region and determine the measures to be taken to ensure child survival. The delegation had concluded that, in order to preserve the remarkable accomplishments in that area and in the field of primary health care, it was essential to combat malaria and AIDS. With regard to malaria, his delegation encouraged UNICEF to participate in the WHO World Summit on Malaria in 1992. With respect to AIDS, a disease which, according to the WHO/UNICEF Joint Committee on Health Policy, might soon obliterate all progress achieved in the field of child survival in certain regions, the Programme Committee should discuss that question as a separate item on its agenda; in view of the seriousness of the topic, it should be given adequate attention, particularly by the Executive Board.

65. The Fund's contribution to inter-agency cooperation was vital for the efficient delivery of emergency health services by the United Nations system, which was currently necessary in the Persian Gulf region. The capacity of UNICEF to ensure the speedy mobilization of resources in such conditions should serve as an example for other United Nations agencies that wished to respond in a rapid and coordinated manner to emergency situations that arose. The Executive Board would review in that regard the administrative framework for such cooperation as described in document E/ICEF/1991/11.

66. In spite of the attention given to emergency situations, UNICEF continued to remind the world of the focus of its regular programmes, particularly in Africa, where the challenge to meet the goals of the World Summit for Children was the most difficult. While priority should be given to that continent, the other regions of the world should not be neglected. His delegation was pleased with the progress made through the Bamako Initiative, which offered important possibilities for improving access to primary health care services and promoted programme sustainability; it also had potential for controlling malaria, diarrhoeal disease, AIDS and other diseases. Nevertheless, UNICEF should ensure that new financing methods did not block the access of poor people to needed services. The Initiative should help revitalize the health systems in Africa.

(Mr. Teeley, United States)

67. In Africa and other regions, development efforts continued to focus on women and girls. The progress report on achievements made in the implementation of UNICEF policy on women and girls (E/ICEF/1991/L.5) demonstrated in an encouraging way the results that could be achieved through global advocacy. None the less, it was cause for concern that only 30 per cent of UNICEF country programmes were complying satisfactorily with Executive Board policy on women and girls. In order to protect women's health and reduce the spread of AIDS it was essential to strengthen voluntary family planning. Thoughtful country population policies and access to family planning sources were critically necessary and UNICEF should promote incorporation of child-spacing activities into all country programmes.

68. His delegation attached great importance to the decision taken the previous year by the Board on external relations. The evaluation on which it had been based had offered valuable suggestions for improving the integration of external relations into UNICEF programmes. It was hoped that the Fund would continue to work towards fulfilling those recommendations in order to strengthen the management and cost-effectiveness of that function, and that the Board would carry out an in-depth review of the matter at its 1992 session.

69. Programme growth required administrative resources sufficient to ensure adequate programme management. While his delegation appreciated the efforts made by UNICEF with regard to the draft budget, there was still some distance to cover before arriving at an optimal budget. One might wonder about the advisability of approving a significant number of new posts at headquarters, the reclassification of a number of posts, the transfer of auditors to headquarters and the acquisition of additional office space in New York.

70. Mr. TIULIANDIN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) said that the past year had been marked by a number of historic events: the end of antagonism between the blocs, progress in disarmament and the emergence of a general awareness of the interdependence of the modern world and the need to find common solutions to problems facing countries. However, those processes would certainly encounter obstacles and difficulties.

71. In 1990, the world had witnessed a flagrant act of aggression against an independent State. The mass mobilization of the international community against the aggressor had signalled a positive change of attitude; there had been a sudden awareness of the unity of the planet and of its limits, as well as of the eternal nature of moral values.

72. In many respects, 1990 had marked a turning point in international cooperation for children. The most outstanding event had been the World Summit for Children, at which the leaders of many countries had demonstrated their political will to accord priority to children in national and international development programmes, by adopting the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990s and a Plan of Action. Those two instruments not only set out the goals and commitments of

(Mr. Tiuliandin, USSR)

the international community but also provided for concrete implementation measures, follow-up operations and control mechanisms.

73. In keeping with the decisions of the Summit, the USSR had recently drawn up a programme of action for the 1990s containing directives for improving the situation of women and families and protecting mothers and children. It had adopted an integrated approach, taking account of social, economic, medical, environmental, ethical and other factors influencing the situation of mothers and children. That set of measures should change the social climate by emphasizing values common to mankind and should also make it possible to bring about significant reductions in maternal and infant mortality rates and the number of handicapped children and orphans, as well as the juvenile delinquency rate. The implementation of those directives would require allocations on the order of 40 billion roubles over a period of 10 years, and investments of 51 billion roubles. The principles which inspired the programme - namely, the priority given to the interests of children, the right of all children to benefit from the social and economic services necessary for their physical and mental development, and the authorities' responsibility for the welfare of destitute children - were in complete conformity with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which the Supreme Soviet of the USSR had ratified in 1990. That instrument also served as the basis for a bill on the same subject, which was currently being considered by all concerned organizations.

74. In spite of the difficulties which it faced and which were principally due to its transition to a market economy, the USSR sought to protect women and children not only by enacting laws but also by providing them with material assistance. The Soviet Union also continued to assist the least developed countries within the limits of its means.

75. His delegation welcomed the fact that UNICEF was currently involved in activities to assist children all over the world, and no longer only those in developing countries. It was essential to adopt a global approach in order to find a solution to problems of world importance. The USSR was grateful to UNICEF and the various agencies which had provided assistance in such emergency situations as the earthquake in Armenia, the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant and the environmental catastrophe of the Aral Sea.

76. One of the Fund's principal tasks was to encourage the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child by all countries prepared to provide concrete proof that they respected the international legal norms for protecting children and defending their rights. By participating in the World Conference on Education for All, UNICEF had demonstrated its determination to step up its participation in activities in that area and to encourage the adoption of innovative approaches to the establishment of national systems of basic education. While the achievement of the goals of the universal child immunization programme was in itself a success, it was still only a first step in carrying out such difficult tasks as ensuring the programme's

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sustainability, increasing vaccination rates, reducing morbidity and mortality rates and eradicating a number of serious diseases. The achievement of those goals would require a reallocation of resources to programmes in the areas of basic education, water supply, the development of new vaccines and emergency humanitarian assistance.

77. Mr. BULL (Liberia) said that, at the end of the 1980s, there had been practically no improvement in the living conditions of people living in most parts of the world, and poverty in Africa and Latin America had even increased. It had then projected that, by the year 2000, sub-Saharan Africa, which had 29 of the 42 least developed countries, would have the greatest proportion of poor in any region of the world. Although that was a dismal projection, there were many ways to reverse that trend, as indicated in the Programme of Action adopted by the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, held at Paris in 1990. Moreover, the World Summit for Children had been an unprecedented event which had provided an opportunity to make real changes. In paragraph 34 of the Plan of Action, each country was invited to prepare a national plan, and UNICEF could play an important role in assisting countries to fulfil that obligation. The results of the universal child immunization programme had shown what planned and concerted action by the international community could achieve. That was a lesson which should be used to increase the effectiveness and sustainability of programmes to implement the goals of the Summit.

78. The World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien, Thailand, had been another important event mentioned in the Executive Director's report. The participants had recognized the need for the quality and accessibility of primary education for all, including children and women.

79. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which provided the legal framework for the survival, protection and development of children, had entered into force only nine months after its adoption by the General Assembly in 1989. The Convention was further testimony of the political commitment of leaders to accord a high level of priority to the situation of children.

80. The world economic situation, coupled with civil strife, natural disasters and disease, was continuing to have a devastating impact on the survival and well-being of millions of African children; he therefore welcomed the priority given by UNICEF to Africa. That region was the only one in the world in which child and maternal mortality were on the rise. In order to reverse that trend, UNICEF, the international community and governments must take up the challenge. The quality of staff in the field was important in achieving that objective, and he noted with satisfaction that the requisite budgetary appropriations had been made to strengthen UNICEF field offices in Africa.

(Mr. Bull, Liberia)

81. He also welcomed the growing support offered by many donor countries for the implementation of the Bamako Initiative, which was designed to strengthen the capacity of the primary health care infrastructure to provide affordable health services with active community participation.

82. Most of the world's emergencies were occurring in Africa. Liberia, for example, had been devastated by a brutal civil war which, unfortunately, had been forgotten by the international community. He noted that, of a population of 2.4 million, 800,000 had been compelled to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, 1.2 million had been internally displaced and an estimated 80,000 had been killed. Accordingly, it was disappointing that the initial appeal for $13.8 million, which had been issued by the Secretary-General in November 1990 upon the resumption of United Nations activities in Liberia, had not received the anticipated response. Nevertheless, through UNICEF, the Scandinavian countries and Canada, a fully equipped field hospital had been set up at Monrovia which was significantly increasing the provision of health services in the area. Furthermore, Sweden had recently announced that it would contribute an additional $3 million to maintain the operation of the hospital. Liberia also expressed appreciation to the many non-governmental organizations operating in its territory and to those donor countries which had contributed food and other assistance. He noted with concern, however, that UNICEF and the World Food Programme (WFP) were the only two United Nations agencies that were fully operational in Liberia, and that the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Health Organization (WHO) maintained only a nominal presence. It was to be hoped that, in view of the urgency of the crisis and the privations which the Liberian people continued to suffer, emergency measures would be adopted to redress the situation.

83. Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka) commended UNICEF on its untiring efforts to alleviate the suffering of the world's children and to ensure their protection and well-being; one of the Fund's primary tasks had always been to enhance child health and nutrition. The various illnesses which had taken the lives of approximately five million children each year and disabled millions more were being controlled by the many vigorous programmes which UNICEF had implemented.

84. There was a close correlation between the policies and programmes of UNICEF and those being implemented by Sri Lanka in order to promote health care, education, and the welfare and development of children. The National Poverty Alleviation Programme or Janasaviya, which encouraged people to become active partners in national development, contained specific measures to improve the lives of women and children. Various other schemes were being implemented in the country, including child immunization, free meals for schoolchildren, the free distribution of a special nutrient, a plan for destitute children, and so on. The existence of free health services had contributed to the great success of the child immunization programme. Through

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that programme, Sri Lanka had been able in 1989 to achieve the goal of universal child immunization which had been set for 1990, and its infant mortality rate was currently one of the lowest in the world.

85. The year 1990 had undoubtedly been a turning-point for the world's children; its major events had included the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the World Conference on Education for All held at Jomtien, Thailand, the issuance of the report on children and the environment and the historic World Summit for Children, which had adopted the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for Implementing the World Declaration in the 1990s. Sri Lanka had recently signed those two documents and the procedure for the ratification of the Convention had just been completed.

86. In summarizing the historic events of 1990, the Executive Director had proposed the creation of a global movement for children, similar to the movements against slavery, colonialism and racism and for equality between men and women. The Sri Lankan delegation supported that initiative and called upon all concerned to unite in a vast alliance on behalf of the rights of children.

87. His Government was fully aware of the importance of the role of women in development. The Women's Bureau under the Minister of State for Women's Affairs was the national focal point for coordinating activities in that area and channelling foreign assistance to projects on behalf of women. A number of non-governmental organizations were also carrying out programmes to improve the status of women. With reference to the progress report on achievements made in the implementation of UNICEF policy on women (E/ICEF/1991/L.5), he noted with satisfaction that UNICEF was proposing various measures to enhance awareness of gender issues and responsiveness to those issues in its programmes.

88. Sri Lanka expressed deep appreciation to UNICEF for having allocated $2 million to it for the period 1991-1993 in order to enable the country to expand its programmes, and for having provided financial assistance to improve health and social services for women and children in the plantation sector. His Government, which was firmly committed to social development in that sector, was implementing various programmes in the fields of primary health care and education.

89. It was to be hoped that UNICEF, which played a key role within the United Nations system with regard to activities to improve the lot of women and children, would continue to collaborate closely with other United Nations agencies working towards that same goal. For its part, Sri Lanka assured UNICEF of its fullest cooperation in all the Fund's future endeavours.

90. Mr. MANSARAY (Sierra Leone) said that his country, as a member of the Executive Board, was overwhelmed by a feeling of pride at the success of events such as the World Summit for Children and the entry into force of the

(Mr. Mansaray, Sierra Leone)

Convention on the Rights of the Child, and of many other activities undertaken by UNICEF on behalf of children. As a net beneficiary of the Fund's programmes, Sierra Leone also saw those events and the Bamako Initiative as a source of renewed hope for the majority of its people. He hoped, therefore, that at the current session, the Board would take bold decisions which would strengthen the capacity of UNICEF to translate those hopes into reality.

91. The cooperation programmes which UNICEF had implemented in Sierra Leone had achieved remarkable success, mainly as a result of ingenious programming techniques and highly efficient delivery methods. In 1986, when the most recent five-year cooperation programme had been launched, the infant mortality rate of 200 per 1,000 live births had been one of the highest in the world. One of the programme's main objectives had been to find a solution to that problem. As a result, the figure had dropped to 153 per 1,000, and the new cooperation programme for 1991-1995 was intended to reduce the rate to 96 per 1,000 by 1995. There had been equally significant reductions in the under-five mortality rate and the maternal mortality rate. Child immunization coverage had reached 75 per cent in 1990, in contrast to 6 per cent in 1985. In order to ensure the durability of those achievements, UNICEF had created a support structure based on the promotion of self-sustaining primary health care facilities, water and sanitation, women in development and basic education. The new cooperation programme would at least consolidate the previous achievements and reaffirm the commitment of UNICEF and the donor community to enhancing the welfare of children and women.

92. The network of primary health units that had been created in the country was now largely managed and financed by the communities they served. Between 1983 and 1989, UNICEF had provided financial and technical support for the construction of approximately 1,000 improved wells that had ensured the supply of clean water to hundreds of thousands of rural children, drastically reducing deaths from diarrhoeal and related diseases.

93. His delegation welcomed the Executive Director's invitation to the Board to offer specific comments on the follow-up to the Declaration and Plan of Action of the World Summit for Children; the need to restructure bilateral donor/recipient cooperation, particularly in the light of the fact that only 3 per cent of bilateral ODA went to primary health care, primary education, and rural water supply and sanitation; and the intention of UNICEF to continue to advocate more forceful debt-relief measures and to promote debt relief for children and implement social investment schemes.

94. In the context of that new thinking, it was necessary to highlight the contradictions inherent in a development philosophy that extolled the primacy of human resource development and environmental protection but diminished donor assistance for the attainment of those objectives. More fundamentally, it was necessary to question the viability of "structural adjustment" as the sole model for bilateral cooperation.

(Mr. Mansaray, Sierra Leone)

95. The implementation of structural adjustment programmes in many African countries had led directly to the undermining of public institutions, as well as the depletion of human resources, so that highly qualified public servants were forced to emigrate in search of decent wages. His delegation therefore implored UNICEF to use its enormous prestige to bring those concerns to the attention of the donor community.

96. Sierra Leone fully endorsed UNICEF's engagement in the international debt debate. There was a direct link between UNICEF's role in that area and the major concessions announced recently by a group of Swiss banks with regard to the developing countries' commercial debt. Indeed, it was clear that the international debt crisis had had direct and significant responsibility for the deterioration of the condition of children in debt-distressed developing countries.

97. His delegation had studied seriously the budget proposals submitted to the Board by UNICEF. In general it supported them, particularly those dealing with strengthening UNICEF's capacity at headquarters, basing its position on a rational assessment of the expanded mandate of the organization dictated by last year's Board decisions, the World Declaration and Plan of Action, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the continued economic and social crises in recipient countries. It had also studied the ACABQ report on the budget proposals. It found the report extremely useful and intended to use the guidelines and advice it offered judiciously.

98. Mr. NDANGA NDINGA (Cameroon) said that that session of the Executive Board was being held at a particularly critical time in the evolution of the world economy, a time marked by an unprecedented recession that was affecting women and children in developing countries in particular. In Africa, the session was aggravated by environmental damage.

99. UNICEF was making praiseworthy efforts to help Cameroon improve protection of mothers and children. Its programme of cooperation dealt mainly with primary health care, drinking water supply and sanitation, the advancement of women and the strengthening of community and family services, the overall objective being to improve the people's living conditions.

100. In the field of health, the principal causes of infantile mortality were sicknesses that could be prevented by vaccination, first among them tetanus and measles, which were responsible for a third of child deaths, followed by malaria, diarrhoeal diseases and respiratory infections resulting from a harsh environment and poor hygiene. The plight of mothers was still of concern, since the maternal mortality rate in 1989 was estimated at 420 deaths for each 100,000 confinements. The underlying causes of the mortality were haemorrhages, anaemia (generally due to malnutrition), infections and obstetrical accidents. In rural areas, ignorance and the lack of medical help were the indirect causes.

(Mr. Ndanga Ndinga, Cameroon)

101. In education, the illiteracy rate among women remained very high in spite of the Government's energetic measures: it was 71 per cent among women over 15. There was also a very high drop-out rate among girls (75 per cent). With regard to sanitation, only 31 per cent of households had access to drinking water and 50 per cent had reasonably good lavatories; clearly, hygiene remained deplorable.

102. The analysis showed that the main problems faced by women and children were the high incidence of disease and death, insufficient access to drinking water, the low level of education among women and the high drop-out rate among girls. As part of its development policy, the Cameroon Government was trying to find solutions to those problems, particularly through measures relating to health, water and sanitation, education, and the advancement of women. Those efforts had however for some time been seriously hindered by the effects of the economic crisis and the socio-economic constraints of the programme of structural adjustment.

103. He reaffirmed Cameroon's attachment to the objectives of the strategies adopted by UNICEF for the 1990s, which inspired the work of the World Summit for Children. Through its active participation in that Summit, Cameroon had reaffirmed its support for all initiatives taken by the international community for the survival, protection and development of children throughout the world. It had signed the Convention on the Rights of the Child and begun the ratification procedure. It had also subscribed to the Declaration and the Plan of Action arrived at during the Summit. Cameroon was currently studying the possibility of developing a national action plan to fulfil the commitment it had made.

104. The expanded programme on immunization implemented in Cameroon had shown real results. With the help of various countries and UNICEF, additional efforts had been made and had enabled half the country's provinces to achieve a vaccination coverage of nearly 75 per cent, though other provinces had relatively low coverage (25 per cent on average). Therefore, efforts would have to be stepped up throughout the country to ensure that the improvement was lasting and to enable provinces whose performance had been less good to reach the stated goals.

105. With respect to integrated primary health care, Cameroon had developed a national reorientation policy in line with the Bamako Initiative and was implementing it progressively in several provinces thanks to bilateral and multilateral aid.

106. In basic education, Cameroon had taken an active part in the work of the World Conference on Education for All held at Jomtien. Cameroon had already organized a national round-table discussion on that subject in order to give effect to the resolutions adopted at that Conference; it had resulted in the adoption of a declaration of general basic education policy and of a 10-year action plan for 1991-2000.

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107. The education of women was an important part of the Government's efforts to assist the populations targeted by UNICEF. Two fundamental aspects of the question should be raised: the formal aspect, having to do with studying why girls drop out of school and how they could be made to stay; and the informal aspect, having to do with the effort to educate women about their health, their children's health and their families' welfare.

108. To reduce infantile mortality by half, to promote the development of the child, to improve the status of women, to preserve the environment, to ensure basic education for all and to mobilize communities in a joint development effort: such were the goals underlying the Cameroon/UNICEF cooperation programme for 1991-1995.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.